

## COLLEGE GOVERNMENT.

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**A**N interesting illustration of the progress of education is furnished by the recent change of discipline in Columbia College. Since its incorporation, a hundred and fifteen years ago, it has, in accordance with general usage, regulated the conduct of its students by a body of statutes and by-laws consisting of detailed directions for deportment, and corresponding penalties for their violation. These have doubtless undergone various modifications within the last hundred years; but they

are now all suspended, as a matter of trial, and a few general regulations substituted, the effect of which is to leave the student more in his own care. External government by repressive rules has been replaced by self-government. The students are assumed to be men, and gentlemen; they are to be allowed the freedom which pertains to this character, and held also to its responsibilities. The unwritten rules which govern social life are to be applied to that of the college. So long as the students deport themselves with propriety, they will be allowed the benefits of the institution; when they cease to be fit associates of gentlemen, they will be excluded from the place. The requisitions regarding study are only such as are deemed needful to secure due coöperation in college work: if the student qualifies himself for graduation, he will graduate; otherwise not.

The question at issue between the old policy and the new is more than a mere matter of college expediency; it is nothing less than the vital question, What mode of government is most conducive to the formation of an elevated moral character? or, What course is best calculated to produce that habitual self-restraint and rectitude of conduct which are needed as a preparation for the responsibilities of life? The higher actions of men are the offspring of motives, and motives are of different kinds—good and bad, high and low; while character results from the quality of those which become predominate and determining. It is the office of education in its moral aspect to bring the student under the influence of those higher and nobler motives which shall spontaneously issue in right action.

Current school discipline, borrowing its theory from civil government, assumes that the strongest motive by which human beings are influenced is fear, or the dread of punishment. But the contrasted purposes in the two cases are here quite overlooked. In political legislation, the true function of which is negative, that is, the prevention of wrongs, the appeal is very properly made to the motive of fear. Civil government presupposes criminality—indeed, springs out of it—and is legitimately occupied in dealing with the worst classes of society by punitive measures. But the office of the college, on the other hand, is positive and constructive. It has to direct the agencies which control intellectual and moral growth, to develop the class of feelings which lead to right action.

Can education effect this in the best manner by the pains-and-penalties policy which is directed to the emotion of fear? Obviously not. This motive appeals to the most degraded of the race; it is the meanest that can actuate a human being, and just to the degree in which it becomes operative it calls out the lower qualities and results in a debased type of character. It is a policy of coercive checks and restraints, and takes effect only upon those who combine weakness with evil tendencies—who wish to do wrong, but dare not. But the course which may have a salutary influence upon the craven and cowardly is

presses the student back upon his sense of right and justice, and upon his manly and honorable impulses; and, in assuming that they exist and are strong, it does not miscalculate. There is no more controlling sentiment in human nature than that of honor. It may take false directions; but it is all-powerful. In its defence, nations will sacrifice all else; to maintain it, individuals will throw away their lives as worthless; even among thieves it is a power. The college authorities who do not recognize this feeling in the minds of students, or who suffer it to be arrayed against them, instead of using it as a potent agency of moral control, have yet to learn the rudiments of their avocation. But appeals to honor will be of little avail, unless inspired by a genuine trust and confidence which ill comports with a system of petty exactions and threatenings.

Another efficient agency which should be turned to valuable account in school management is public opinion among the students. The wise teacher, who takes counsel of his opportunities rather than of his pride of position, will be cautious how he contravenes the public sentiment of his school. If wrong, he will aim to correct it—he will *wait* to correct it; but, until changed, he will respect and not defy it. Even in society, men are tried by their peers for alleged offences; can there be a doubt that this method would work with far greater advantage among young men at college? In civil life, we hold public opinion to be the fountain of law, and are fast arriving at the conclusion that enactments are practical nullities, unless supported by it; can there be a question that the principle is equally sound in its application to college government? Backed by the public opinion of his school, a teacher is wellnigh omnipotent; but here again the indispensable prerequisite is a faith in the good intentions, if not in the judgment, of the young men. A student will break rules, but he will not incur the condemnation of his fellows. It is one thing for the officials to dismiss him from college for the infraction of a statute—the chances are high that he will leave with the sympathy of his associates, a martyr to arbitrary authority; but it is another and a far different thing for him to be expelled by the verdict of his fellow-students—the disgrace would be intolerable, and could be incurred only by those who well deserved it.

This movement is, therefore, something more than a mere shift of college tactics for the ends of passing convenience; it is in the highest sense itself educational—it is a practical extension of the curriculum to the department of moral culture. The inculcation of virtuous precepts, fervid exhortations to rectitude, denunciations of evil courses, and threats of punishment, supplemented by the reading of a little ethics in the last year of the course, are far from what is required; in fact, all this has been done, if not overdone, long before in the home and the family. Little is needed in the theory of morality; much in its practice, for it is only to be truly learned by making

and the teacher who can inspire an interest in study has in this a potent element of control. It is generally the young men not much engaged with their work whose activities overflow into the channels of mischief. A great deal depends, therefore, in this matter, upon the attractiveness of the intellectual pursuits. We might infer that scientific institutions which deal with modern and practical subjects having a direct and obvious bearing upon life should have the least difficulty in managing students, and this conclusion we understand to be confirmed in actual experience. On the other hand, classical institutions, which are mainly occupied with drill in dead languages, the advantage of which is not immediate usefulness, but an alleged, indefinite, and remote mental discipline, cannot fail to take a less powerful hold upon the student's feelings, and they are therefore driven to the adoption of an external coercive discipline. The old colleges, therefore, have an intrinsic embarrassment in entering upon this experiment of leaving students to themselves, which will greatly enhance the credit of success, if success be reached.